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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Russian attacks ongoing despite truce: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 20 APRIL

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia on Sunday of creating a false appearance of honoring an Easter ceasefire, saying Moscow continued to launch attacks overnight, citing a dozen drone strikes, 387 shelling incidents and 19 assaults. "As of Easter morning, we can say that the Russian army is trying to create a general impression of a ceasefire, but in some places, it does not abandon individual attempts to advance and inflict losses on Ukraine," Zelenskyy said in a post on X. *—PTI*

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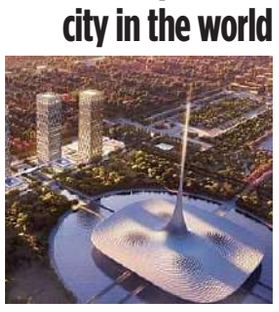
Amaravati to be 1st renewable-powered city in the world



VIJAYAWADA, 20 APRIL

Amaravati, the planned capital of Andhra Pradesh, is set to create history as it targets to become the world's first city to be powered entirely by renewable energy as town planners look to build an ultra-modern yet environmentally sustainable "people's capital". With an ambitious plan to harness 2,700 megawatts (MW) of green energy, the city aims to meet all its electricity needs through sustainable sources like solar, wind, and hydropower, officials said. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's dream new capital city project firmly aligns with India's broader commitment to clean energy and climate action. - *—PTI*

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SC lawyer seeks contempt action against Dubey

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Supreme Court advocate Anas Tanveer has written to Attorney General R Venkatramani seeking consent to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey for making "scandalous" and "derogatory" remarks against the Supreme Court and Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna.

Tanveer, who represents a litigant in the Waqf Act case, cited Dubey's recent comments, where the MP questioned the judiciary's role in lawmaking and accused the Chief Justice of being responsible for "civil wars." The letter argues that the statements were "dangerously provocative" and aimed at undermining the authority of the court.

Dubey made the remarks after the Centre assured the court it would not implement certain contentious provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act pending further hearing.

The BJP distanced itself from Dubey's statements, with party president JP Nadda calling them his personal opinion and reaffirming the party's respect for the judiciary. *— PTI*

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Karnataka ex-DGP Om Prakash found dead in B'luru home

He was stabbed to death; wife detained

Om Prakash *PHOTO: SALAR*

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Retired Director General and Inspector General of Police (DGP & IGP) Om Prakash, 68, was found dead at his residence in Bengaluru's HSR Layout on Sunday.

Police suspect that he was murdered.

His wife, Pallavi, who informed the police about the murder has been detained for questioning along with their daughter.

Police discovered his body in a pool of blood, and a blood-stained knife was recovered from the scene after they were informed about the murder by Pallavi.

Reports indicate that the retired DGP had previously expressed concerns about threats to his life to some close associates.

Initial investigations point to a domestic dispute that may have turned fatal. Police sources revealed that the couple faced financial difficulties, leading to frequent arguments over property and money matters.

- Reports indicate that the retired DGP had previously expressed concerns about threats to his life to some close associates.

Om Prakash, a 1981-batch IPS officer from the Bihar cadre, served as Karnataka's 38th DGP from March 2015 to January 2017. Originally from Champaran, Bihar, he began his career as assistant superintendent of police in Harapanahalli, Ballari, and held significant postings in Shivamogga, Uttara Kannada, Chikkamagaluru, the Vigilance Cell, Lokayukta, CID, Fire Services, and the Transport Department. He was noted for his administrative capabilities and played a major role during the 1993 Bhatkal communal riots. The police said that his body was riddled with injuries and has been sent to St John's Hospital for post-mortem. *—Salar News*

Senior citizen dragged out of MP hospital

CHHATARPUR, 20 APRIL

A senior citizen was dragged out of a government hospital by two men in Madhya Pradesh. Authorities claim that he was misbehaving, necessitating the forceful eviction, while the man claims he was kicked and slapped by the doctor.

The video of the incident, showing two men dragging the 70-year-old Uddhav Singh Joshi has since gone viral on social media.

The incident took place on 17 April when he had come to the district hospital in Chhatarpur for his wife's medical check-up.

"I remained in queue for a long time after getting the time slot slip. When my turn came, Dr Rajesh Mishra objected and then slapped and kicked me," Joshi alleged while speaking to reporters.

Refuting his charges, civil surgeon GL Ahirwar said the place was overcrowded and Dr Mishra objected because Joshi had broken the queue. *—PTI*

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FLASH FLOODS IN J&K

Vehicles stuck in the debris after heavy rain triggered flash floods, in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

3 dead and 100 rescues after heavy rainfall due to cloudbursts triggered flash floods and landslides in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban on Sunday.

100s stranded after landslide blocked the Jammu-Srinagar NH, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country.

Modi, Vance to hold talks today

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

US Vice President JD Vance is set to hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after arriving in New Delhi on Monday. The talks are reportedly on a range of key issues, including trade, tariff, regional security and expansion of bilateral engagement.

The focus of the meeting is likely to be on early finalisation of the proposed bilateral trade pact and to boost overall ties between the two countries, sources said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Indian ambassador to US Vinay Mohan Kwatra are expected to be part of the Indian team. *—PTI*

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EASTER JOY

Churchgoers distribute Easter sweets and eggs to children and elders during a special Easter Sunday service at St Andrew's Church on Cubbon Road, Bengaluru *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

LG admits rebel surge in J&K, Centre's in denial

SRINAGAR, 20 APRIL

In a rare admission, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has acknowledged a surge in militant violence in the Jammu region, diverging sharply from the Central government's persistent claims of restored peace post-Article 370 abrogation.

Speaking at a police passing-out parade in Ganderbal, Sinha stated, 'Terrorist incidents have increased in the Jammu division, which is a matter of concern.' While asserting that militancy had been 'crushed' in the Valley, he pledged to make both regions terrorism-free.

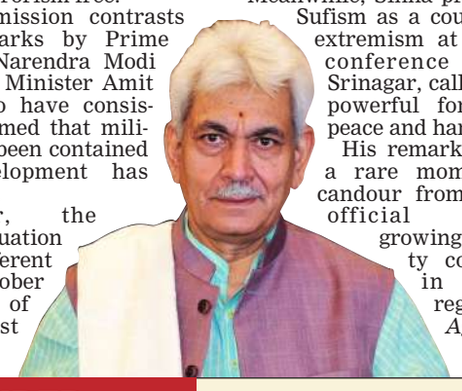
This admission contrasts with remarks by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, who have consistently claimed that militancy has been contained and development has taken root.

However, the ground situation tells a different story. October saw one of the worst civilian attacks in years in Gagangir, Ganderbal, followed by a deadly ambush on an army vehicle in Gulmarg. Jammu, once largely peaceful, has now become a hotspot, with recent attacks in Kathua and Kishtwar claiming the lives of police and soldiers.

- This admission contrasts with remarks by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has claimed that militancy has been contained and development has taken root.

Meanwhile, Sinha promoted Sufism as a counter to extremism at a Sufi conference in Srinagar, calling it a powerful force for peace and harmony.

His remarks mark a rare moment of candour from a top official amid growing security concerns in the region. *— Agencies*



PRO-KHALISTANIS VANDALISE CANADA'S GURUDWARA

OTTAWA, 20 APRIL

A gurudwara in Canada's Vancouver has been vandalised with pro-Khalistan graffiti, with its leaders blaming a small group of Sikh separatists for the act, according to a media report.

The local police said it was investigating graffiti sprayed on Saturday at the Ross Street Gurdwara, Vancouver Sun reported.

Vancouver Police Department spokesperson Sgt. Steve Addison said Saturday that police are looking into the graffiti at the gurdwara, the newspaper said.

He said the police do not have a suspect.

The Khalsa Diwan Society, which runs the Ross Street Gurdwara, blamed the vandalism on a small group of Sikh separatists advocating Khalistan.

"This act is part of an ongoing campaign by extremist forces that seem to instil fear and division within the Canadian Sikh community," the society said in a statement. "Their actions undermine the values of inclusivity, respect, and mutual support that are foundational to both Sikhism and to Canadian society," it said, urging Canadians to stand strong in the face of extremism. *—PTI*

PRINCIPAL SUSPENDED

Janivara row: Khandre offers free seat to student at BKIT

BIDAR, 20 APRIL

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre has offered a free engineering seat to Suchivrat Kulkarni, a CET aspirant who was denied entry to the exam hall for wearing a janivara (sacred thread) during the mathematics paper of the Common Entrance Test.

Suchivrat has been assured admission at Bheemanna Khandre Technical College in Bhalki—one of North Karnataka's prominent engineering colleges and the flagship institution of the Shanti Vardhak Education Society, chaired by Khandre.

Accompanied by Minister Rahim Khan, Khandre visited the student's home on Sunday and termed the incident a "serious lapse" by private college staff, stressing that such occurrences must not be repeated.

He also stated that discussions are underway with the Higher Education Minister to explore allowing Suchivrat to write a separate exam. Additionally, the student is eligible for the COMED-K exam, and the government will extend support if he secures a seat through that route.

The Bidar Deputy Commissioner's report to the Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA) blamed the exam officials. Following the report, the principal of Sai Spoorthi Pre-University College, Dr Chandra Shekar Biradar, and staff member Satish Pawar have been suspended. *—Salar News*

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Accompanied by Minister Rahim Khan, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre visited the student Suchivrat Kulkarni's home on Sunday in Bidar *PHOTO: SALAR*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Forest Minister orders probe into Mysuru tree felling

MYSURU, 20 APRIL

Forest Minister Eshwar B Khandre ordered an inquiry into the felling of 40 trees by the Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) for road widening near the SP office on Hyder Ali Road. Responding to public protests, the minister condemned the Forest Department for granting permission and directed an investigation. In a letter dated 19 April, Khandre demanded a detailed report within seven days, questioning the necessity of cutting trees for a 200m stretch. Citing Supreme Court guidelines and growing concerns over climate change, he urged officials to justify the clearance given. The tree felling has drawn widespread criticism, with many claiming the road widening was unnecessary.

—Salar News

Mysuru man beats mom to death over alcohol money

MYSURU, 20 APRIL

A forty-year-old man allegedly beat his mother to death with sticks in Navilur, Piriyapatna taluk, Mysuru, on Sunday after she refused to give him money for alcohol. According to police reports, the deceased is Jayamma, aged 60. Her son, Swany, 40, was arrested. Jayamma resided in the village with her ailing husband and Swany, who was reportedly an alcoholic with a history of demanding money from her. The victim had saved Rs 90,000 for her husband's medical treatment, which she kept at their home.On Sunday, with his father in the hospital, Swany allegedly started an argument with his mother, demanding the money she had saved for alcohol. In a fit of rage, he is accused of beating her with a heavy stick, inflicting fatal injuries at the scene when she refused his demands. Bylakuppe Police have registered a case.

—Salar News

3 more students say 'sacred threads' cut at CET centre

DKS says govt does not stop people from following religion

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

In Bidar, a student was denied entry to write the CET paper for wearing sacred thread **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Close on the heels of the "sacred thread desecration" incident involving a student in Shivamogga during the Common Entrance Test (CET), three more cases have come to light in Bidar, Gadag, and Dharwad.

Three Brahmin students have now alleged that they were either denied entry into the exam hall or had their sacred thread cut and removed before the exam.

In Bidar, a student was reportedly denied entry to write the CET paper for wearing the sacred thread.

In Halakeri (Gadag) and in Dharwad, exam authorities allegedly cut and threw the sacred thread into the dustbin.

"I was so disturbed after the incident that I couldn't focus on the exam," the student told reporters in Dharwad.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the government is committed to taking action against whoever is at fault.

Speaking at an event in Belthangadi Vokkaligara Seva Sangha and Vani Shiksha Sanstha, Shivakumar said, "The government will not interfere in the practice of religion. Our government is committed to protecting every religion."

He added, "There is no need for anyone to worry. The state government will work to take everyone along." While in one case, a police complaint has been registered in Shivamogga, in another instance, the principal and a staff member of a school in Bidar were dismissed from service. *—PTI*

4 BOOKED

Contract killers suspected in Ricky Rai's shooting

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Ramanagara police suspect contract killers were behind the recent shooting of Ricky Rai, son of late underworld figure Muthappa Rai, on Friday evening.

Ricky Rai **PHOTO: SALAR**

Superintendent of Police Srinivas Gowda confirmed that four teams have been formed, including one focusing specifically on known hired gunmen. Though several individuals have been questioned, the attackers remain unidentified more than 24 hours after the botched assassination attempt.

Police are probing multiple angles, including disputes over Muthappa Rai's property, business rivalries linked to Ricky Rai's real estate interests, and personal enmities. "No motive is being ruled out at this stage," Gowda said.

A complaint filed by Ricky's driver, Basavaraju, at Bidadi police station names four suspects: Anuradha (Muthappa Rai's second wife), Rakesh Malli, Nitesh Shetty, and Vaidyanathan. Basavaraju claims Ricky voiced suspicions about them before being hospitalised.

Bidadi police have taken preliminary statements from the driver and will record Ricky Rai's version once his condition permits. "Once we hear from the victim, the investigation will gain momentum," a senior officer told Salar News. Police are preparing to issue notices to the four for questioning. Investigators also recovered a basic mobile phone without a SIM card from the scene, which could be a vital clue. *—Salar News*

A mini bus collided with a stationary Indigo aircraft at the City's Kempegowda International Airporton Sunday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Mini bus collides with aircraft at Bluru airport

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

A mini bus collided with a stationary Indigo aircraft at the Kempegowda International Airport here, an airport official said on Sunday.

The vehicle hit the 'undercarriage of the non-operational aircraft', the airport spokesperson said.

However, no injuries were reported in the incident.

"On 18 April, 2025, at 12.15pm, a vehicle operated by a third-party ground handling agency made contact with the undercarriage of a non-operational Aircraft On-Ground at Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru. There were no injuries reported," a statement read.

"All necessary protocols have been promptly followed in coordination with relevant stakeholders. The safety and security of our passengers, airline partners, and airport personnel remain our highest priority."

The Indigo Airlines said, "We are aware of the ground incident at Bengaluru airport involving a parked IndiGo aircraft and a third party ground vehicle. *—PTI*

ED warns breeder for lying about Rs 50 crore 'Wolfdog'

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has warned Bengaluru-based dog breeder S Satish for making false claims on social media, including the fabrication that he owned a rare 'wolfdog' worth Rs 50 crore.

The warning follows a raid at his JP Nagar residence, initially prompted by suspicions of money laundering linked to the alleged high-value dog purchase. Investigations, however, revealed that the dog was neither rare nor foreign but of local origin—marketed misleadingly as exotic.

Satish, known for flaunting a flamboyant lifestyle, came under scrutiny for hosting extravagant pet parties and projecting an image of wealth. The ED uncovered a dubious business model involving renting dogs for Rs 10,000 and selling them for up to Rs 80,000.

Officials noted that Satish frequently rented luxury clothing and hosted flashy events, including a dog's birthday party at a Bengaluru pub attended by celebrities such as actor Anirudh, BM Harish, and actress Sanjjanaa Galrani.

Satish, known for flaunting a flamboyant lifestyle, came under scrutiny for hosting extravagant pet parties **PHOTO: SALAR**

With no evidence of financial transactions involving crores, the ED has cautioned Satish against further misleading claims. If such behaviour continues, legal action will follow, the agency said.

What began as a bizarre claim about a luxury canine has evolved into a stark warning about social media deception and the role of enforcement agencies in curbing it. *—Salar News*

EX-ARMY MAN KILLED BY ANGRY SON IN CITY

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

A 47-year-old retired Army man was allegedly strangled to death by his teenage son in the early hours of Sunday, following repeated clashes over discipline. The incident occurred in Vannarpet, under the Viveknagar police limits.

The deceased, Bolu Arab Islam, was a former Army serviceman known for his strict lifestyle. His son, Sameer, 19, a first-year BCom student, was reportedly frustrated by his father's constant scoldings, particularly about his late returns and spending habits.

Police said the two often argued over Sameer's behaviour, and on Saturday night, another heated exchange erupted. Around 2am Sunday, in a fit of rage, Sameer allegedly strangled his sleeping father. He later tried to mislead police, claiming a group of unidentified men had attacked Bolu. However, CCTV footage from the area showed no sign of intruders. *—Salar News*

No hasty decisions taken on caste census, says DKS amid uproar

MANGALURU, 20 APRIL

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar stated on Sunday that the state government would not take any hasty decision regarding the socio-economic survey, commonly referred to as the caste census.

"We will empower the oppressed and ensure justice for everyone. There will be no hasty decisions on this matter," Shivakumar said in Mangaluru.

When asked about Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's recent letter reportedly concerning the caste census, Shivakumar said he had not seen the letter.

Shivakumar also highlighted that poverty exists across all communities, mentioning specific groups to underscore the inclusive nature of the Congress party's agenda.

"There are poor people in all communities, including Jains, Vokkaligas, and Lingayats and justice will be provided to all," he added. Gandhi had urged the state government to enact the Rohith Vemula Act to do away with caste-based discrimination in the education system as millions of students from Dalit, Adivasi and OBC communities continue to face brutal discrimination in educational institutions even today.

- Shivakumar also highlighted that poverty exists across all communities, mentioning specific groups to underscore the inclusive nature of the Congress party's agenda.

Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar died by suicide in January 2016, allegedly upset over disciplinary actions taken against him by the Hyderabad Central University where he had been pursuing a PhD. He was found hanging from a ceiling fan in a hostel room on 17 January, 2016. *—PTI*

Dubai Chamber's opens new office in City

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

The decision to set up the second representative office of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce (DCC) in Bengaluru in India signals the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) strong commitment to a strategic pivot towards technology, startups, and clean energy collaborations, industry experts said.

The DCC' Bengaluru branch was inaugurated on 9 April during Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's visit to India. Indian and UAE signed eight memoranda of understanding.

The DCC has its first office in Mumbai.

"Bengaluru becoming the 34th hub of the DCC will be a huge jump. I have a few companies headquartered in Bengaluru, which is already third on the list of global startup hubs," Bollywood actor-turned-businessman and managing director of BNW Developments, Vivek Anand Oberoi said.

The branch was inaugurated on 9 April during Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's visit to India **PHOTO: PTI**

Since the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) came into effect, the UAE has been exploring opportunities in various sectors with India.

Dubai's initiative often influences all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations.

The growth of fintech in India, driven by the unified payments interface (UPI), has led many countries to explore ways of integrating that model into their ecosystems, said R Lakshmanan, senior partner at Dubai-based MCA.

- Since the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement came into effect, the UAE has been exploring opportunities in various sectors.

Non-oil sectors like the textile industry have also profited greatly due India-UAE bilateral ties.

Sahitya Chaturvedi, secretary general of the Indian Business and Professional Council, Dubai, said that the Bengaluru office is not a surprise, considering that the DCC saw 4,563 new registrations from India in 2025 and AED 142 billion in non-oil trade in 2024, reflecting a 19 per cent year-on-year growth.

The choice for Bengaluru is quite logical with UAE placing the digital economy at the forefront.

Even if India has no "tax efficiency", it has the advantage of having the greatest market on earth for a start-up, Oberoi said. *—PTI*

'AGAINST CONSTITUTION'

BENGALUREANS BRAVE RAIN TO PROTEST AGAINST WAQF ACT

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Undeterred by Sunday evening's downpour, hundreds of civil society activists, students and Muslims gathered at Bengaluru's Freedom Park to protest against the controversial Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

The protest, organised under the banner 'Hum Samvidhan Ke Log', is part of a growing national movement demanding the repeal of the law, which many deem unconstitutional.

"This isn't reform — it's a systematic erosion of minority rights," protester Maria Hussain told Salar News. "Today it's Muslims. Tomorrow it'll be Christians. Eventually, it could be Hindus. This Act threatens the plural soul of India," she said.

The amended law, now called Uniform Waqf Management, Empowerment and Endowment Development (UWMEED), is under fire for allegedly undermining the autonomy of Waqf institutions such as mosques, madrasas, graveyards, and dargahs. Activists claim it centralises control, bypasses community involvement, and ignores constitutional protections.

Vinay Srinivasan, a civil rights activist, pointed out that "lakhs of objections were submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee, yet none were accepted. This Act serves the Sangh Parivar, not the Muslim community."

Activist Tanveer Ahmed admitted there are issues of corruption in some Waqf boards but added, "Cleaning is fine, but not by snatching community control."

One of the biggest concerns is the removal of the "Waqf by user" clause, which historically protected religious sites based on long-standing public use. On 16 April, the Supreme Court questioned this provision, warning it could wipe out the status of many such properties.

The Supreme Court has currently stayed new appointments under the Act and barred alterations to existing Waqf properties till 5 May.

Protesters say their resistance will continue until the law is repealed. "We, the citizens, will not yield," declared a representative from Hum Samvidhan Ke Log. *—Salar News*

"Ambedkar's Vision Lives On"
"NO BILL CAN SILENCE JUSTICE" DEFEND ARTICLE 14!
"Saviours of Democracy"
REJECT UNCONSTITUTIONAL WAQF AMENDMENT ACT!

Muslims and civil society volunteers protest against the Waqf Act 2025 at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

PHOTO: X

Omar Abdullah slams Delhi airport for flight diversion

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah criticised Delhi airport after his flight from Jammu was delayed and diverted to Jaipur due to congestion. In a post on X, Abdullah described the airport as a 'bloody sh*t show,' saying he spent hours in the air before landing in Jaipur around 1am. Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) apologised, explaining that runway has been closed for upgrading since 8 April. The situation was also affected by unseasonal easterly winds, causing operational constraints and diversions. DIAL said safety remains the priority. An IndiGo source also cited congestion as the reason for the diversion. *—PTI*

MDMK's Durai Vaiko withdraws resignation

CHENNAI, 20 APRIL

TMDMK leader and party founder Vaiko on Sunday announced that his son, Durai Vaiko, who had resigned from his position as principal secretary on Saturday, has decided to withdraw his resignation after resolving differences with another senior leader. Addressing reporters here, Vaiko said Durai had a difference of opinion with senior leader Mallai Sathya, but resolved it through an open discussion on Sunday. Both have agreed to set aside their differences and work together for the party's welfare. Sathya also assured his full support for Durai. "Following Sathya's assurance, he (Durai Vaiko) has withdrawn his decision to resign," Vaiko added. Many MDMK leaders had expressed their support for Durai who said he would continue to work for the welfare of the party. Vaiko criticised the media for carrying out "untrue" narratives. *—PTI*

M'rashtra ex-cop booked for comments on EVMs

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 20 APRIL

Dismissed police sub-inspector Ranjit Kasle has been booked by Beed police for allegedly making false claims about EVM manipulation during the Maharashtra assembly elections. A poll official filed a complaint after a video surfaced on 18 April, in which Kasle claimed he was paid Rs 10 lakh to stay away from the EVMs and remain silent if they were tampered with. Kasle, already under arrest for an earlier case under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, had previously made sensational claims of being offered money to kill Walmik Karad, a suspect in the murder of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh. Police have denied Kasle's allegations, calling them baseless. *—PTI*

Punjab launches ₹500 cr scheme for stubble burning

CHANDIGARH, 20 APRIL

The Punjab government has launched a Rs 500 crore scheme to provide crop residue management (CRM) machinery to farmers in an effort to curb stubble burning, Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian announced on Sunday. Farmers can now apply online for subsidies—50 per cent for individuals and 80 per cent for cooperatives and gram panchayats—to purchase CRM equipment such as happy seeders, super seeders, balers, and straw choppers. The initiative aims to make eco-friendly alternatives more accessible. Stubble burning is a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi-NCR. *—PTI*

Modi, US VP Vance to hold talks amid trade turmoil

JD Vance is set to deliver a speech in Rajasthan tomorrow

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

US Vice President JD Vance is set to hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after arriving in New Delhi on Monday. The talks are reportedly on a range of key issues, including trade, tariff, regional security and expansion of bilateral engagement.

The focus of the meeting is likely to be on early finalisation of the proposed bilateral trade pact and to boost overall ties between the two countries, sources said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Indian ambassador to US Vinay Mohan Kwatra are expected to be part of the Indian team to be led by Modi.

At 6:30pm on Monday, Modi will welcome Vance and his family at his residence that will be followed by official talks. Modi will then host a dinner for the American leader and Indian-origin Second Lady Usha Vance in the evening.

The US Vice President, his wife and their three children -- Ewan, Vivek, and Mirabel -- are scheduled to land at the Palam airbase at 10am on Monday on a four-day India visit.

Besides Delhi, Vance and his family will travel to Jaipur and Agra.

On 22 April, the Vances will visit a number of historical sites, including the Amer Fort, also known as Amber For, a UNESCO world heritage site. In the afternoon, the US Vice President is scheduled to address a gathering at the Rajasthan International Centre in Jaipur, sources said.

Vance is expected to delve into broader aspects of India-US relations under the Trump administration during his speech, set to be attended by diplomats, foreign policy experts, Indian government officials and academia.

Vance's first visit to India comes weeks after US President Donald Trump imposed and then paused sweeping tariffs against around 60 countries, including India. Elon Musk, head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), is also scheduled to visit soon. *—PTI*

CITES UK RULING

Sanjay Bhandari opposes 'fugitive' tag

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Arms dealer Sanjay Bhandari opposed the ED's plea before a Delhi court seeking to declare him a "fugitive" in connection to a black money case. He claimed his stay in the UK was legal since his extradition to India was denied by the London High Court.

Bhandari made the submissions before the court through his lawyer on 19 April, claiming that ED's application was "does not comply with the requirements of the Fugitive Offenders Act".

The High Court of Justice, London, UK in February allowed Bhandari's appeal against his extradition to India to face charges of alleged tax evasion and money laundering, saying that in Tihar jail here he would be at "real risk" of extortion, threats and "actual violence".

UK earlier this month also dismissed the petition filed by the Government of India seeking permission to appeal in Britain's Supreme Court against its order.

His legal team claimed that as per Fugitive Offenders Act, the value involved in the scheduled offence is required to be Rs 100 crore or more to declare a person fugitive.

However, no such assessment was made by the IT department in the plea seeking to declare him a fugitive. *—PTI*

Talks underway: Raut on Raj, Uddhav reconciliation

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

- Sanjay Raut said that there was no announcement of any alliance but emotional talks were going on. Meanwhile, Dy CM Eknath Shinde was annoyed by questions about the possibility of them working together again

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday said there has been no announcement of an alliance between his party and the MNS, but claimed "emotional talks" between the two are going on.

Raut said Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray has not set out a precondition for rapprochement with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president and his cousin Raj Thackeray.

"There is no announcement of an alliance. Currently, emotional talks are going on," Raut said.

The buzz about rapprochement started after Raj said in a podcast interview with filmmaker Mahesh that he had no issues when working with Uddhav.

Raj and Uddhav have sparked speculation about a possible reconciliation with statements indicating they could ignore "trivial issues" and join hands nearly two decades after a bitter parting of ways.

Uddhav had said nothing should be done to help the "thieves", referring to the BJP and Shinde-led Sena.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde got irked when his reaction on the speculation of reconciliation between the estranged cousins was sought.

"Talk instead about government work," Shinde told a reporter.

Maharashtra minister and BJP leader Nitesh Rane, meanwhile, asked if Uddhav had consulted his wife Rashmi Thackeray before responding to Raj's statement, claiming she had played a major role in the latter's exit from the party. *—PTI*

Shiv Sena (UBP) MP Sanjay Raut said chief Uddhav Thackeray has not set out a precondition for rapprochement with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President and his cousin Raj Thackeray **PHOTO: PTI**

Political hypocrisy: Cong on MP's attack on SC

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Congress on Sunday described the BJP disassociating itself from the criticism of the Supreme Court by its MPs Nishikant Dubey and Dinesh Sharma as "damage control".

Congress also asked why no action had been taken against the two MPs and why no show cause notices were issued.

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said the BJP distancing itself from the "atrocious remarks" of the MPs on the Chief Justice of India (CJI) was meaningless.

"These MPs are repeat offenders when it comes to hate speech. The outgoing BJP president's clarification is nothing but damage control," Ramesh said on X.

"This is the entire political science reflecting itself as entire political hypocrisy," he said. "If the continued silence of the Prime Minister on these repeated attacks on the Indian Constitution is not tacitly supportive of them, why has no action been taken against these two MPs?"

Party president JP Nadda had termed the MPs' comments as their personal views.

Dubey and Sharma had said that the Parliament should be shut down if the Supreme Court ruled on laws. Dubey had also blamed CJI Sanjiv Khanna for "civil wars" in the country. *—PTI*

Members of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal protest against the recent communal violence in West Bengal's Murshidabad, in Prayagraj on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Main accused in WB riot murder held

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

One of the prime accused in the murder of a man and his son in West Bengal's violence-hit Murshidabad district has been arrested.

This was the fourth arrest in the killing that took place at Jafrabad in Shamsherganj. The accused, Ziaul Sheikh, had been absconding.

Sheikh was arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of the West Bengal police along with the Special Investigating Team (SIT) from his hideout in Chopra in Uttar Dinajpur district on 19 April.

"This person had conspired and instigated a mob to vandalise the residence and kill the father and son," a police officer said.

Earlier, the police had arrested Kalu Nadar, Dildar and Inzmam Ul Haque for their involvement in the killings.

Over 100 FIRs were lodged, 3 people killed and 276 arrested in the Murshidabad violence cases.

Meanwhile the National Commission for Women said it will submit a report to the Centre with copies to top state officials soon. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Law Ministry for reducing cases involving Centre

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Union Law Ministry has highlighted that poorly implemented decisions intended for public welfare can trigger legal action, as affected individuals may seek redress through the courts. This concern comes as the Central government is currently involved in nearly seven lakh pending court cases, with the Finance Ministry alone accounting for around two lakh, according to official data.

The Department of Legal Affairs has outlined new measures aimed at reducing and preventing litigation involving central ministries, departments, and public sector undertakings (PSUs).

Key measures in the directive include avoiding unwarranted appeals, rectifying inconsistencies in notifications and orders, and simplifying legal processes. The aim is to reduce the government's legal burden and improve administrative efficiency. *—PTI*

INDIA alliance will contest UP polls together: Akhilesh

PRAYAGRAJ, 20 APRIL

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday reaffirmed that the opposition INDIA alliance will remain intact for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. He asserted that the PDA (an alliance of Backwards, Dalits, and Minorities) would remove the BJP from power in the state.

Addressing a press conference in Prayagraj, Yadav accused the BJP of acting like a "land mafia", alleging the Waqf (Amendment) Bill was aimed at land grabbing. 'Wherever they see land, they occupy it,' he said.

He criticised the ruling party for taking money from the public through demonetisation and GST, and for weakening the reservation system. He also condemned the handling of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, promising an inquiry into its 'mismanagement' if the SP comes to power.

Referring to the January stampede, Yadav claimed drones and CCTV cameras failed when needed most and accused the government of pressuring families to alter the cause of death. *—PTI*

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav addresses a press conference, in Prayagraj **PHOTO: PTI**

THE AVENGERS

New players churn Bihar politics ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

With Bihar heading into assembly elections, a wave of new political parties led by high-profile figures with little electoral experience is reshaping the state's political equations.

Initially, political strategist-turned-activist Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party appeared to be the only serious new challenger. However, former Congress leader IP Gupta has now launched the Indian Inquilab Party, staging an impressive rally at Gandhi Maidan centered on caste mobilisation. Gupta has focused on rallying the Tanti and Tantva castes, categorised under the Extremely Backward Classes (EBC), following a conventional identity-based approach to gain traction.

Adding complexity to the race is the entry of flamboyant former IPS officer Shivdeep Lande, who has formed the Hind Sena. Though Lande, a Maharashtrian, has limited political credentials, his law enforcement image gives him some brand recognition in his adopted "karmabhoomi," Bihar.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, Congress Bihar in-charge Krishna Allavaru, VIP Chief Mukesh Sahni after a meeting of the Mahagathbandhan **PHOTO: PTI**

Another key figure is RCP Singh, once a trusted aide of Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar. A fellow Kurmi, Singh launched Aap Sab Ki Awaz after a short-lived stint with the BJP, which sidelined him following its renewed alliance with the JD(U). Singh is now attempting a political comeback, leveraging his bureaucratic background and community ties.

Observers note that while these parties may not secure many seats, they have the potential to act as spoilers by splitting votes. An RJD leader likened their role to that of Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party in 2020, which is believed to have cost the JD(U) nearly 35 seats.

The rise of these players could make this election cycle more unpredictable than ever. *—PTI*

Nitish Kumar switches sides for 'kursi': Kharge

BUXAR, 20 APRIL

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday called the alliance between the ruling JD(U) and the BJP in Bihar "opportunistic" and claimed that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar switches sides for 'kursi' (chair).

Addressing the party's Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan rally at the Dalsagar stadium in Buxar, Kharge urged people of the state to oust the NDA government in the assembly polls due later this year.

"The alliance between Nitish Kumar and the BJP is opportunistic. Nitish Kumar switches sides just for 'kursi'. The JD(U) chief has joined hands with the ideology that killed Mahatma Gandhi," the Congress president alleged.

"People of Bihar must ask Nitish Kumar what happened to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise of Rs 1.25 lakh crore package for Bihar. Modi is running a factory of lies," Kharge charged. Modi had announced the package on 18 August, 2015.

The NDA government must be ousted in the coming assembly polls in Bihar, he said, adding that "people should vote for 'Mahagathbandhan' parties. *—PTI*

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge addresses a rally, in Buxar, Bihar on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Kerala man kills neighbour over trespassing of dog

THRISSUR, 20 APRIL

A 42-year-old man was allegedly stabbed to death by his neighbour near Vellikulangara following a dispute over a dog, police said on Sunday. The victim, Shijo, and the accused, Joseph, 69, were long-time neighbours who frequently argued about Shijo's dog wandering into Joseph's yard. On Saturday night, when the dog reportedly entered the yard again, the argument escalated into a physical assault. During the fight, Joseph allegedly stabbed Shijo, resulting in his death. Police said the accused is currently in custody, but his arrest has not yet been formally recorded. *—PTI*

Bihar cop shoots colleague dead during argument

WEST CHAMPARAN, 20 APRIL

A constable allegedly shot dead his colleague with a service rifle at the Bettiah Police Line in Bihar's West Champaran district late Saturday night, police said. According to officials, the accused has been identified as Constable Sarvjeet Kumar, who opened fire on the victim Constable Sonu Kumar with his Self-Loading Rifle around 10.20pm on Saturday. The victim sustained 11 bullet injuries and died on the spot, police said. Speaking to ANI, Sadar Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Vivek Deep said that both constables were recently transferred to the Bettiah Police Line and had been working together. A total of 12 rounds were fired during the incident, with 11 shells and one live cartridge recovered from the scene. "Constable Sarvjeet Kumar said that there were some family issues, and during an argument, he lost his mental balance," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

UP man cuts off wife's braid in dowry harassment

HARDOI, 20 APRIL

A man in an Uttar Pradesh district has been arrested for allegedly cutting off his wife's braid at a beauty parlour, police said. The incident came to light after the woman's father, Radhakrishna, filed a complaint accusing his son-in-law, Rampratap, of dowry harassment. He claimed his daughter had faced continuous abuse since their marriage a year ago, with demands for items like a refrigerator and a cooler. A week before the incident, Radhakrishna had brought his daughter back to her parental home. According to the complaint, Rampratap, accompanied by three men, confronted his wife at the parlour and cut her braid. While the father links the act to dowry abuse, locals allege Rampratap was angered by her visit to shape her eyebrows. Police say the matter is under active investigation. *—PTI*

Nine arrested in engine theft from Kia's AP plant

PENUKONDA, 20 APRIL

Nine people have been arrested by the Andhra Pradesh police in connection with the theft of 900 engines from Kia Motors' plant located in the Sri Sathya Sai district, police said on Sunday. The Penukonda court remanded the accused to 14 days of judicial custody, as police continue to investigate the large-scale theft that has shocked the auto industry. "Only ten per cent of the investigation is complete. Nine people have been arrested, and we are investigating the modus operandi," police told PTI. Further, police disclosed that the stolen engines were smuggled and sold across multiple states in India, indicating a widespread illegal network operating beyond Andhra Pradesh's borders. *—PTI*

3 killed, over 100 rescued in flash floods at J&K

Landslides lead to closure of the Jammu-Srinagar highway

RAMBAN/JAMMU, 20 APRIL

Vehicles stuck in the debris after heavy rain triggered flash floods in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

At least three people were killed after heavy rain triggered flash floods at different places in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district early on Sunday, officials said. More than 100 trapped people were rescued by police.

The incessant rain also triggered landslides and mudslides at nearly a dozen places between Nashri and Banihal along the strategic Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, prompting traffic to be suspended, they said.

The officials said a cloudburst struck the Seri Bagna village of Ramban, resulting in the deaths of three persons, including brothers Aqib Ahmad and Mohd Saqib.

The officials said about 40 residential houses were damaged after a flash flood hit Dharam Kund village. Ten houses were fully destroyed while the rest suffered partial damage.

More than 100 trapped villagers were rescued by police personnel who rushed to the spot despite the continuous downpour and cloudbursts, they said and added several vehicles were swept away in the flood caused by a stream overflowing.

A senior government official said there had been massive damage in the entire district due to heavy rain, cloudbursts, high-velocity winds, landslides and hailstorms.

"We are monitoring the situation and an assessment will be carried out later to provide assistance to the affected population. Our priority at the moment is to safeguard lives," said the senior official, wishing not to be named.

A traffic department spokesperson said vehicular movement on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was stopped from both sides due to landslides, mudslides and shooting stones at multiple places between Nashri and Banihal.

The officials said hundreds of commuters were left stranded on the 250-kilometre highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, following its closure.

With the latest fatalities, five people have lost their lives in rain-related incidents in the Jammu region in two days. Two people, including a woman, were killed and another woman injured when they were struck by lightning in the Arnas area of Reasi district late on Saturday. *—PTI*

SSC for Aadhaar-based filtering for government jobs from May

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Candidates can authenticate themselves using Aadhaar at the time of online registration, while filling up online application form and while appearing at the test centre to take the examinations *PHOTO: PTI*

The Staff Selection Commission (SSC) has decided to implement Aadhaar-based biometric authentication in its all forthcoming examinations in order to verify candidates' identity on a voluntary basis.

The new measure will come into force for recruitment tests conducted from May onwards.

The SSC is one of the largest recruitment agencies of the central government that conducts selections for non-gazetted posts in various central ministries and departments, among others.

Candidates will be able to authenticate themselves using Aadhaar at the time of online registration, while filling up online application form and while appearing at the test centre to take the examinations.

Aadhaar authentication is voluntary and intended to promote the ease of engaging with the examination process and ensure that candidates do not fake their identity or use other fraudulent means while taking the tests.

The Personnel Ministry had on 28 August, 2024 issued an identical notification, a first for any recruitment agency, to approve Aadhaar-based authentication by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

Lakhs of candidates appear in government jobs recruitment tests conducted across the country by the SSC and UPSC.

The UPSC had in 2024 also decided to use facial recognition and artificial intelligence-based CCTV surveillance systems to prevent cheating and impersonation in its various tests. *—PTI*

TWO CHEETAHS TO GET NEW HOME IN MP SANCTUARY

SHEOPUR/BHOPAL, 20 APRIL

After spending two years at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district, cheetahs Prabhash and Pavak will reach their new habitat on Sunday evening.

The six-year old cheetahs will be shifted to the Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary, situated in Mandsaur and Neemuch districts and over 250 km from Kuno.

Additional principal chief conservator of forests, Uttam Kumar Sharma on 19 April said that preparations were completed for shifting of the animals.

Prabhash and Pavak would be taken by road to the Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary, where Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will release them.

The two cheetahs were brought from South Africa's Waterberg Biosphere Reserve to the KNP in February 2023. *—PTI*

POLITICS OF FAVOUR

Rule of law or rule of muscle? HC on illegal buildings

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

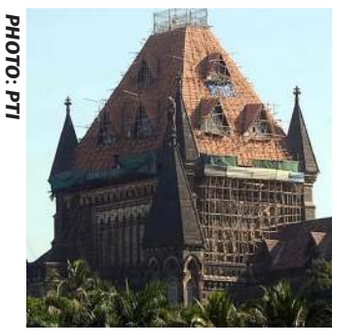


PHOTO: PTI

Does the rule of law or rule of muscle power prevail, the Bombay High Court asked, slamming the government's city planning agency CIDCO for failing to act against illegal structures in Navi Mumbai.

A division bench of Justices AS Gadkari and Kamal in the order passed earlier this month said the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) authorities were not desirous of taking stringent action against unauthorised constructions.

The CIDCO claimed that when they had tried to initiate legal action against the illegal structures, they were threatened by the sarpanch of Bokadvira village.

The bench replied that officers are entitled to get sufficient police protection, and it was the duty of the authorities to prevent illegalities and establish rule of law. "We fail to understand, as to whether, we live in a state where rule of law prevails or the rule of muscle power prevails," the HC said.

The court was hearing a petition filed by a couple in 2016, seeking a direction to the CIDCO to demolish the unauthorised structures erected by one Deepak Patil on their land in Navi Mumbai. As per the plea, the illegal structures (shops) have been constructed on 123 sq metres of the land owned by the petitioners. The court directed the CIDCO to adopt all necessary legal measures to remove unauthorised constructions made on the petitioners' land within a period of one week. *—PTI*

Will act swiftly on cyber fraud: Mumbai cops

Mumbai, 20 April

The city police assured the Bombay High Court that they would act with alacrity on cyber fraud complaints and sensitise police officials on prompt action and registration of FIR whenever such complaints are received. The bench of justices Revati Mohite Dere and Neela Gokhale in the order passed on 15 April noted that cyber fraud cases were on the rise and senior citizens were falling victim to fraudsters. *—PTI*

Dalit boy raped, beaten, urinated on in R'than

JAIPUR, 20 APRIL

A 19-year-old Dalit boy from Sikar district of Rajasthan said he was raped, beaten and urinated on by two men, police said on Sunday, adding that the incident took place in Sikar's Fatehpur area on 8 April but an FIR was lodged on 16 April.

According to the complaint, the youth stepped out to watch a wedding procession in his village on 8 April when the two accused called him to a bus stand on the pretext of some work. The two then took him to a secluded location and hit him, including on his private parts, forced him to remove his clothes and raped him, the complaint stated.

"They were drunk. They hit me with a bottle, urinated on me and used casteist slurs," the victim alleged, adding that the accused also recorded a video of their acts and "threatened" to share it on social media if he told anyone about the incident.

A case has been registered under sections of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, he said. *—PTI*

AIR SHOW

Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team performs on the second day above the Army Ground at Namkum in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

MP hospital staff assaults senior citizen

CHHATARPUR, 20 APRIL

Video of senior citizen being dragged in MP hospital goes viral; authorities say he broke queue *PHOTO: X/@INCMP*

A video of a septuagenarian being dragged by two men in a government hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district has gone viral, with authorities and the victim giving conflicting versions of the chain of events.

In the video, two men are seen holding the hands of Joshi and dragging him. While the man said he was kicked and slapped by a doctor during the appointment, following a long wait in the queue, hospital authorities said he had come out of turn, which triggered an argument.

The incident took place on 17 April when Uddhav Singh Joshi, 70, a resident of Naugaon town, had come to the district hospital in Chhatarpur for his wife's medical check-up. "I remained in queue for a long time after getting the time slot slip. When my turn came, Dr Rajesh Mishra objected and then slapped and kicked me," Joshi said. *—PTI*

FOR THE PEOPLE?

Locals flag green concerns over jetty near Gateway of India

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

The proposed passenger jetty near the Gateway of India has run into rough weather from locals who see it as an environment hazard and a threat to heritage sites.

Residents say the jetty near the Radio Club is an environment hazard and a threat to heritage structures. They united under the Clean Heritage Colaba Residents Association (CHCRA) to oppose the project.

However, the state government insisted that the Rs 229-crore project, set to be developed by the Maharashtra Maritime Board, will serve the cause of ordinary people.

Likely to be completed in two years, the project is expected to reroute all boat traffic from the Gateway of India.

"This project, if implemented, will disrupt the delicate balance of Colaba's cultural, environmental and social fabric. We have to protect Mumbai's heritage, reduce traffic congestion, and address the growing risks of climate change,'' Rocky Lobo, a spokesperson of the CHCRA, told PTI. "We can shift jetty to other places, like Indira Dock or Bhau Cha Dhakka."

If they build pillars as part of the project by drilling or blasting the sea bed, it will have a damaging effect to heritage sites, he warned.

"Permissions were given under political pressure with no application of mind. If you are honest and sincere with your permissions, share them with us, take stakeholders into confidence. After double parking on roads, now attempt is being made to encroach 600-800 metres into the sea. The project is an environment hazard and tampers with nature," CHCRA president Subhash Motwani emphasised.

Ports Minister Nitesh Rane said the jetty was CM Devendra Fadnavis' ambition project and his department obtained all necessary permissions. "We are an elected government and people should trust us," he said. *—PTI*

The site of the proposed passenger jetty near the Gateway of India, to be developed by the Maharashtra Maritime Board *PHOTO: PTI*

FOUR MARATHI FILMS SELECTED FOR CANNES

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

Four Marathi films have been selected for Cannes Film Festival in France next month, Maharashtra Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar said on Sunday. The selection was made by a panel of experts from the Maharashtra Film, Theatre and Cultural Development Corporation.

Three films – Sthal, Snow Flower and Khalid Ka Shivaji – have been selected for screening, while Juna Furniture will receive a special screening slot. Since 2016, the Maharashtra cultural body has been sending films to Cannes. Shelar praised the selections as a sign of the growing reach and relevance of Marathi cinema on the world stage. *—PTI*

HUMANOIDS RUN MARATHON

China hosted the world's first humanoid robot half-marathon on Saturday, with 21 robots running alongside humans in a 21km race through Beijing's Economic-Technological Development Area. The event showcased China's AI progress amid growing tech rivalry with the US. Robots of various shapes were launched in intervals over one metre, confined to separate tracks, with battery swaps like Formula 1 pit stops. Sky Project Ultra crossed the finish line first, cheered on by large sidewalk crowds ***PHOTO: PTI***

India seeks 'right to cool' in summers to protect workers

Climate experts have proposed urgent measures, including paid heat leave, free water ATMs at labour hubs and legal recognition for the "right to cool", to protect India's informal workforce during the extreme summer months.

More than 80 per cent of Delhi's workers, including street vendors, construction labourers and ragpickers, face severe health risks and income loss due to extreme heat. The women among them are disproportionately affected, the experts said. Amruta, a campaigner at Greenpeace India, highlighted that heat waves were no longer just weather events but disasters for those without shelter, water or rest spaces.

A Greenpeace India report last year found that 61 per cent of street vendors lost more than 40 per cent of their daily income during extreme heat while 75 per cent lacked access to cooling infrastructure near workplaces. Hisham Mundol, chief advisor at Environmental Defense Fund - India, said informal workers bore the brunt of heat waves and rising cases of dehydration, heatstroke and chronic illnesses such as kidney damage underscored the urgent need for intervention.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted above-normal maximum temperatures for large parts of northwest, central, and eastern India between April and June. In its seasonal outlook, the IMD warned that the number of heatwave days this summer might be significantly higher than usual, especially over Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and western Madhya Pradesh. Delhi had recorded seven heatwave days in April 2024 alone, compared to a normal average of two to three.

With 82 per cent of working women in India engaged in informal labour, gender-responsive urban planning is critical. Amruta of Greenpeace India said women faced compounding risks -- lack of shaded vending zones, unsafe toilets and caregiving burdens. "Gender-responsive urban planning could include measures such as (free) public toilets with water and hygiene facilities that are accessible and safe rest zones near transport hubs and marketplaces. A feminist approach to urban planning recognises the importance of end-to-end connectivity in public transport -- ensuring not just access to buses and metros but safe, affordable and dignified commutes from home to the workplace and back," she told PTI.

Mundol said urban planning needed to be improved universally but it was also true that the circumstances of women impacted them uniquely. "Better facilities for all such as shelters, drinking water and other public facilities are needed and sensitive thought has to be applied to make sure they are equally accessible and welcoming for women," he said.

Pradeep Shah, co-founder of the social project initiative Grow-Trees.com, emphasised planning with gender-disaggregated data could create shaded, child-friendly workspaces, enhancing safety and resilience. While the India Cooling Action Plan (2019) acknowledged cooling as a developmental need, the experts said it fell short in ensuring equitable access.

"Cooling disparities must be addressed as a basic right. A 'right to cool' under Article 21 would mandate shaded bus stops, cooling shelters, and thermal comfort for all," Amruta said. Mundol laid stress on the need for city-level heat action plans with enforceable measures -- non-negotiable paid time off, water stations and cooling shelters on red-alert days.

The experts proposed several immediate solutions to mitigate the impact of extreme heat on vulnerable populations. These include installing shaded canopies made of heat-reflective materials in high-traffic areas, setting up free water ATMs near labour hubs to ensure hydration, and deploying mobile cooling stations equipped with fans and basic first-aid facilities.

Additionally, Amruta recommended keeping public parks accessible 24x7 to serve as natural cooling zones for those without shelter.

She called for heat waves to be officially declared a national disaster that would unlock emergency funds and compensation mechanisms for affected workers. "Legal frameworks must integrate climate justice to ensure informal workers aren't left behind," she said.

Echoing her sentiment, Mundol said, "Climate justice means supporting those least responsible yet most impacted by rising temperatures."

Integrating climate justice into urban planning is going to be a key determinant for making the city an attractive place to live and invest in, he said. *—PTI*

More than 80 per cent of Delhi's workers, including street vendors, construction labourers and ragpickers, face severe health risks and income loss due to extreme heat ***PHOTO: PTI***

SALAR

DMK revives Karunanidhi's fight for state autonomy

While Chief Minister MK Stalin days ago announced the formation of a panel led by former judge of the Supreme Court, Kurian Joseph to recommend measures to strengthen autonomy for the states, his father M Karunanidhi had fought for the same over 50 years ago when he helmed the state as Chief Minister.

Batting for state autonomy, Karunanidhi had on 16 April, 1974, moved a resolution in the State Assembly and it was adopted. No doubt, DMK founder CN Annadurai, who championed the cause of state autonomy, and who served as the Chief Minister between 1967 and 1969 was a big inspiration for Karunanidhi.

Piloting the resolution, Karunanidhi, popularly known as "Kalaignar" extensively quoted Annadurai and it includes the DMK icon's last article that appeared in 1969 in English journal Home Rule.

Anna, as Annaudrai was fondly addressed, was quoted as having written: "Dear Brother, Never have I been mad after power. Nor am I happy of being the Chief Minister of our State under a Constitution which on paper is federal but in actual practice tends to get more and more centralised. On that account, I do not like my good friend EMS declare that it is my intention to irritate the Centre or pick up quarrels with Delhi."

On 8 April, 1967, at a press conference in New Delhi, Anna had said: "It will be sufficient if the Centre retains only such powers as are necessary for preserving the unity and integrity of the country leaving adequate powers to the states. In order to distribute the powers and to suggest the method of working out the Constitution, a high power commission should be appointed."

Underscoring all these aspects, Karunanidhi recalled that he had on 19 August, 1969 announced setting up of a three-member panel led by PV Rajamannar, with AL Mudaliar and P Chandra Reddy being its members. Accordingly, on 22 September, 1969, the committee was constituted to examine the question of the relationship between the Centre and the states on the basis of autonomy for the states, "without in the least impairing the integrity of the country."

The 1971 election manifesto of the DMK demanded Constitutional amendment for optimal autonomy and the April 1967 presser of Annadurai on this subject formed the operative part of the party's manifesto.

The report of the Rajamannar Committee was received on 27 May, 1971 by the state government and it was sent to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who acknowledged it on 22 June, 1971. Gandhi had said the Administrative Reforms Commission also had dealt with the question and its report was under the Centre's consideration.

Interestingly, HV Hande moved an amendment to add the following: "This House, however, calls upon the state government not to unleash divisive forces and encourage fissiparous tendencies in the name of State autonomy."

Hande also mooted action, if necessary against those who threaten division of the country if the demand of state autonomy is not conceded and also wanted the government to be vigilant of the tendency among some to show Pakistan and Bangladesh as example to strengthen the demand for autonomy.

Muslim League's VM Abdul Jabbar referring to the "yet to be resolved Cauvery river water dispute," wondered whether the "all powerful" Central government could not have determined the quantum of water release; which has such high powers.

"Only the God knows as to when the Cauvery water issue with neigbouring Karnataka will be resolved. Given the attitude of the Central government, the situation is such that it may not be resolved even after 10 years." He also cited example of Ukraine, and its exalted status as it was also a member of UN.

Legislator K Kandaswamy quoted from an article in a daily which said, "this pattern of settling Centre-State relations at the Congress high command level, cannot possibly be extended to conditions now prevailing when non-Congress ministries are in power in some of the states."

Karunanidhi moved the resolution which said: "The House, taking into consideration the Tamil Nadu government views on state autonomy and the Report of the Rajamannar Committee; resolves that, in order to secure the integrity of India with people of different languages, civilisation and culture, to promote economic development and to enable the state government having close contact with the people to function without restraints, and in order to establish a truly federal set up with full state autonomy, the central government do accept the views of the Tamil Nadu government on state autonomy and the recommendations of the Rajamannar Committee and proceed to effect immediate changes in the Constitution of India."

Karunanidhi initiated the discussion which took place for five days from 16 to 20 April, 1974. In total, 37 members took part in the discussion. *—PTI*

Batting for state autonomy, M Karunanidhi had on 16 April, 1974, moved a resolution in the State Assembly and it was adopted ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Easter indulges: Egg-shaped chocolates and hot cross buns

With Easter around the corner, you'll have seen chocolate Easter eggs on supermarket shelves. Maybe you've bought some already.

But is there a difference between Easter chocolate and the everyday kind? Does Easter chocolate really taste better, as some people say?

As we'll see, any difference is less about the ingredients and more about how we experience the chocolate when we eat it. When we compared the ingredients and nutrients of Easter egg chocolate and regular chocolate from the same company, we found no major differences.

Cadbury Dairy Milk hollow Easter egg and Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate block both contain per 100 gram: about 2,200 kilojoules of energy, 7g protein, 31g fat, 55g sugar. Both products have a minimum 24 per cent milk solids. The egg has a marginally higher percentage of cocoa solids than the block.

So if they contain pretty much the same ingredients, what else is going on? It's more about the taste, texture and smell The difference between Easter chocolate and regular chocolate is more about how we experience the flavour of chocolate – via taste, texture and smell.

Taste is the recognition of simple ingredients dissolving in saliva and entering the taste pores on our tongue. In the case of chocolate, we perceive the taste as sweet (sugar), fatty (cocoa butter) and potentially bitter (caffeine and other cocoa-based compounds). However, texture and smell make us most likely to tell the difference between Easter and regular chocolate.

The mouth is incredibly sensitive to the texture of foods. We perceive multiple physical qualities of a food, which we call "mouthfeel". Smoothness, creaminess and mouthcoating are important components of chocolate's mouthfeel. Consumers also expect round-shaped chocolate to be creamier than angular-shape chocolate. So even before we've taken a bite, we perceive a chocolate egg will be creamier than a block. These expectations can shape how we experience the flavour of chocolate. However, if the chocolate egg is not as creamy as expected, this can be disappointing.

The temperature at which chocolate is made and stored also impacts its texture. Sometimes chocolate gets a whitish haze on its surface called chocolate bloom. This is when the fat and sugar separate from each other, forming fat or sugar crystals. It is safe to eat chocolate with bloom, but it may taste less creamy or more gritty than chocolate without bloom.

Eating Easter eggs and hunting for them are often part of a shared family ritual, and eating hot cross buns at Easter shows how traditions change with each generation ***PHOTO: AI***

Because the demand is so high during Easter, chocolate manufacturers sometimes use rapid-cooling techniques to produce hollow Easter eggs at a faster rate.

Finally, smell contributes the most to how we perceive flavour in foods. When chocolate starts to melt in our mouth, aromas are released. These aromas make their way through back of the nose where we smell complex scents and notes of chocolate. Depending on the chocolate, it could include fruity, earthy, buttery or floral aromas.

We've already heard the shape of chocolate influences how creamy we think it is. But the shape of chocolate also influences other aspects of our eating experience. Easter chocolate in the shape of an egg or an animal provides a large contact area inside the mouth meaning it will melt faster than a block. This impacts how quickly aroma compounds are released from the chocolate.

Biting into hollow chocolate, such as eggs and animals, may also require more time to chew and swallow. This results in Easter chocolate spending longer in our mouths with a greater release of aromas. This means we perceive a greater intensity or diversity of flavours compared to eating small squares.

How someone eats chocolate can also change its flavour. One study categorised people who ate chocolate as "suckers" or "chewers". So how a person eats Easter chocolate may also impact whether they prefer it over regular chocolate. Last of all, eating Easter eggs and hunting for them are often part of a shared family ritual. This can make Easter chocolate seem special. So whether you are a sucker or a chewer.

A brief history of hot cross buns

Hot cross buns aren't just a sweet snack that appears around Easter. They carry centuries of storytelling in their dough. From ancient gods to modern supermarkets, these sticky spiced buns have crossed many borders and beliefs. Today, you can buy them in all kinds of flavours. But their story is far richer than chocolate chips and salted caramel.

In some ancient cultures, bread was more than just food. It was a symbol of faith. Ancient Greeks baked small round loaves marked with crosses to honour their gods. According to some historians, these marks could represent the four seasons or four phases of the moon. Jewish people have also shared special bread during holy times like Passover, and scholars have debated whether these customs influenced early Christian bread traditions.

Pagan Saxons worshipped a spring goddess named Eostre. They baked bread during springtime festivals to celebrate new life and longer days. The name "Eostre" is where we get the English word "Easter". Over time, some of these springtime bread traditions blended with Christian customs.

Eating hot cross buns at Easter also shows how traditions change with each generation. At first, they were hard to find outside Good Friday. Now, you might see them in shops just after New Year's.

They once symbolised pagan festivals, then moved into Christian rites, survived royal bans, and sailed through waves of superstition. Yet they remain a symbol of Easter in Australia and around the world. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

EU lists India, B'desh to speed up asylum process

BRUSSELS, 16 APRIL

The European Commission on Wednesday proposed speeding up certain aspects of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum by introducing key measures. One of the main steps includes creating the first EU list of safe countries of origin, which includes India, Kosovo, Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. In a release, the European Commission said, "Today, the Commission is proposing to accelerate the implementation of certain aspects of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted last year and due to enter into application in June 2026." Magnus Brunner, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, said that many EU countries are struggling with a growing backlog of asylum applications, and speeding up the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is essential. *—ANI*

Ecuador on alert after threat to President Noboa

QUITO, 19 APRIL

Ecuadorian authorities warned on Saturday that the Andean country is on "high alert" after it received intelligence about a suspected attempt on President Daniel Noboa's life. The government posted on X that it was warned "about the planning of an assassination, terrorist attacks and... violent protests". The ministry said it had taken security measures to neutralised the alleged threats. The warning comes days after Noboa won re-election, defeating leftist opposition candidate Luisa González by a margin of more than one million votes, according to electoral authorities. Noboa has gained popularity for his crackdown on organised crime at a time that violence has soared, prompting the president to declare that Ecuador is in an "internal armed conflict".*—PTI*

Pak minister gets a 'green welcome' in Tatta district

ISLAMABAD, APR 20

A state minister in Sindh province of Pakistan has been attacked by protestors who took out a rally against a plan for new canals, sources said on Saturday. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz lawmaker Kheal Das Kohistani, the minister of state for religious affairs, was driving through Thatta district on Saturday when his motorcade was pelted with tomatoes and potatoes by protesters who chanted slogans against the federal government. Officials said Kohistani was unharmed in the attack. Radio Pakistan reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif telephoned Kohistani and assured him of a thorough investigation into the incident. "The persons involved would be given punishment," the prime minister said. *—PTI*

Tunisian Oppn leaders awarded up to 66 yrs in jail

TUNIS, 20 APRIL

A court in Tunisia has sentenced leading opposition figures to between 13 and 66 years in prison in the climax of a major trial accusing 40 people of conspiring against state security, according to Tunisian media reports. Activists called the case baseless and politically motivated. Tunisian President Kais Saied has rolled back many freedoms the North African country gained after spawning the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings in 2011. Those accused in the trial include former diplomats, business leaders, journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders. The trial began in March and wrapped early Saturday with the court handing down the sentences of between 13 and 66 years to prominent opposition leaders, said official news agency TAP. *—PTI*

Russia, Ukraine in 'Easter' blamegame

Ukrainian Prez Zelenskyy says his offer to extend truce to another 30 days still on table

Volodymyr Zelensky
PHOTO: PTI

An elderly woman prepares her Easter baskets to be blessed in Krasne village, Ukraine

Ukraine's soldier operates an FPV drone in a shelter in Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region

A memorial service for an 11-year-old killed together with his parents in a Russian attack in Sumy, Ukraine *PHOTO: PTI*

KYIV, 20 APRIL

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia on Sunday of creating a false appearance of honoring an Easter ceasefire, saying Moscow continued to launch attacks overnight, citing a dozen drone strikes, 387 shelling incidents and 19 assaults.

"As of Easter morning, we can say that the Russian army is trying to create a general impression of a ceasefire, but in some places, it does not abandon individual attempts to advance and inflict losses on Ukraine," Zelenskyy said in a post on X.

Despite Putin's declaration of an Easter ceasefire on Saturday, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces had recorded 59 instances of Russian shelling and five assaults by units across various areas along the front line, as well as "dozens" of drone strikes.

Zelenskyy emphasized that Russia must fully adhere to the ceasefire conditions and reiterated Ukraine's offer to extend the truce for 30 days, starting Sunday midnight. He said the proposal "remains on the table" and that "we will act in accordance with the actual situation on the ground."

Russia said it repelled firing snd shelling by Ukrainian units. "Ukrainian troops continue to strike peaceful cities in the Kherson region, violating the Easter truce," Moscow-appointed governor Vladimir Saldo wrote on his Telegram channel.

Just hours after the Russian president had announced the ceasefire, he attended an Easter service late Saturday at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour led by Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a vocal supporter of Putin and the war in Ukraine. *—Agencies*

No choice but to continue fighting in Gaza: Netanyahu

DEIR AL-BALAH, 20 APRIL

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said again Saturday that Israel has "no choice" but to continue fighting in Gaza and will not end the war before destroying Hamas, freeing the hostages and ensuring that the territory won't present a threat to Israel.

The prime minister also repeated his vow to make sure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon.

Netanyahu is under growing pressure at home not only from families of hostages and their supporters but also from reservist and retired Israeli soldiers who question the continuation of the war after Israel shattered a ceasefire last month. In his statement, he claimed that Hamas has rejected Israel's latest proposal to free half the hostages for a continued ceasefire.

The prime minister spoke after Israeli strikes killed more than 90 people in 48 hours, Gaza's Health Ministry said Saturday. Israeli troops have been increasing their attacks including hospitals to pressure Hamas to release the hostages and disarm.

Frustration has been growing on both sides, with rare public protests against Hamas in Gaza and continued weekly rallies in Israel pressing the government to reach a deal to bring all hostages home. Thousands of Israelis joined protests Saturday night pressing for a deal. *—PTI*

Varda Ben Baruch, holding a picture of her grandson Edan Alexander who is held hostage in Gaza, talking to Israeli soldiers *PHOTO: PTI*

US, Iran engage in 'direct' nuclear talks

ROME, 20 APRIL

US officials described the talks with Iran as "constructive" and making "very good progress" as they to meet over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme again next week in Oman on April 26.

President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke face to face, a US official confirmed during the negotiations in Rome,

In Iranian state television Araghchi said, "the talks were held in a constructive environment and I can say that is moving forward. I hope that we will be in a better position after the technical talks. This time, we succeeded to reach a better understanding about a sort of principles and aims."

Abbas Araghchi and Steve Witkoff *PHOTO: X*

Before the Iran talks started, Witkoff met in Rome with International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Mariano Grossi. The watchdog agency would likely be key in verifying compliance by Iran should a deal be reached, as it did with the 2015 accord Iran reached with world powers.

Iran is seeking to rebuild its troubled economy. Rumours that the government could increase the cost of subsidised gasoline in the country, worry its citizens and threatens to cause unrest. Iran's 'Rial' currency plunged to over 1 million to a US dollar earlier this month. *—PTI*

PAPAL HONOUR

Pope Francis receives US Vice President JD Vance before bestowing the Urbi et Orbi (Latin for 'to the city and to the world') blessing at the end of the Easter mass presided over by Cardinal Angelo Comastri in St Peter's Square at the Vatican Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

ANTI-TRUMP PROTESTERS DECRY FALL OF DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

NEW YORK, 20 APRIL

Two weeks after a nationwide rally, US citizens protesting against President Donald Trump took to the streets again on Saturday, decrying what they see as threats to the nation's democratic ideals.

The disparate events ranged from a march through midtown Manhattan, a rally in front of the White House to a demonstration at a Massachusetts. In Denver, hundreds of protesters gathered at the Colorado State Capitol with banners expressing solidarity with immigrants and telling the Trump administration: "Hands Off!"

Thousands marched through downtown Portland, Oregon, while in San Francisco, hundreds spelled out the words "Impeach & Remove" on a sandy beach along the Pacific Ocean, also with an inverted US flag. People walked through Anchorage, Alaska, with handmade signs listing reasons why they were demonstrating. *—PTI*

US pounded Sanaa, say Yemeni rebels

CAIRO, 20 APRIL

Yemen's Houthi rebels said on Saturday that the US military launched a series of airstrikes on Sanaa and Hodeida less than two days after a US strike wrecked a Red Sea port and killed more than 70 people. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Saturday appealed to countries protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and respecting international law. US Central Command has maintained the attack on Ras Isa was meant to cut off the Houthi rebels' fuel source and "the strike was not intended to harm the people of Yemen." *—PTI*

A Yemeni shows remains of one of the shells from a location reportedly struck by US airstrikes in Sanaa, on Sunday

HOTO: PTI

B'desh pushes for gender equality in Parliament

DHAKA, 20 APRIL

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has directed authorities to 'immediately' implement the recommendations of a report that calls for increasing the total number of seats in the parliament to 600, with one general seat for each parliamentary constituency and one reserved for women, according to a media report on Saturday. The current parliament of Bangladesh has 350 seats, of which 50 are reserved for women.

"The recommendations that can be implemented quickly should be executed through us. We can set an example for other countries in the world through this work. Women around the world are looking at this. They will review it and be inspired. Women in other countries are also serious about this," Yunus was quoted as saying by the news portal.

The Commission, formed by the Interim government in November last year, submitted its report to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus earlier in the day, bdnews24.com reported. Among 15 recommendations, the panel has made three major recommendations on the Constitution, the law and women's rights, stressing the need to strengthen the basis of equality and protection, it said.

In its report, the panel has asked to focus on decentralisation and local-level development to establish women's interests and rights. *—PTI*

Pak, Afghan govts unite against terrorist attacks across borders

KABUL, APRIL 20

Pakistan and Afghanistan have reached an agreement to prevent terrorists from using their soil to carry out attacks against each other, as reported by Dawn.

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar is in Kabul to hold talks with the Afghanistan Government to improve frayed ties amidst spate of terrorist attacks and threats.

Addressing a press conference after talks with many Afghan officials, Dar said both countries would take responsibility to address threats.

"We have requested our hosts that we have to work together for the progress, betterment and peace and security of the region. For that, neither will we allow anyone to use our soil to conduct illicit activities in Afghanistan and graciously nor will you allow anyone to use Afghan soil."

Emphasising the need to deepen bilateral relations between the two countries, Dar requested that trade delegations and exhibitions between the two countries also be facilitated, as such activities were highly necessary to ramp up trade, prosperity, and business between the neighbours.

Tension had escalated between the two countries after Pakistan launched air strikes against the Pakistani Taliban in retaliation for the killing of their 16 soldiers and an exchange of fire at the border was shared between Afghan and Taliban forces. *—ANI*

STRONG WILL

Sherpa guide to break own record, to scale Mount Everest for 31st time

KATHMANDU, 20 APRIL

One of the greatest mountain guides will attempt to scale the world's highest peak for the 31st time and possibly the 32nd time as well and break his own record.

Kami Rita, 55, flew to Mount Everest on Sunday from Kathmandu to lead a group of climbers who will try to reach the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) summit during the spring climbing season.

"I am mentally, emotionally and physically prepared to climb the mountain," Kami Rita told The Associated Press at Kathmandu's airport. "I am in my top physical condition right now."

A file photo of Kami Rita at the Tribhuvan airport as he prepares to depart to ascend Mount Everest for the 31st time *PHOTO: PTI*

Since he climbed Everest in 1994 for the first time, he has been making the trip every year, Having ascended 30 times atop the peak. In May last year he climbed the peak twice.

"My first priority is to get my client to the summit of the peak. Then I will decide on whether I will climb the peak more than one time during the season. It depends on the weather and conditions on the mountain," he said. His closest is fellow Sherpa guide Pasang Dawa, who has made 27 successful ascents.

In addition to his Everest climbs, Kami Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world's highest, including K2, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse. *—PTI*

INDEFINITE STRIKE

A member of a pro-monarchist group challenges police officers during a protest in Kathmandu *Photo: PTI*

Pro-monarchists defy Nepal govt warnings

KATHMANDU, 20 APRIL

Despite warnings from the country's Home MInistry, hundreds of supporters of Nepal's pro-monarchist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) staged a protest rally on Sunday near the Prime Minister's official residence and the Parliament building here, demanding reinstatement of monarchy and establishing the Himalayan nation as a Hindu state.

Around 1,500 demonstrators gathered at the Bijulibajar-Baneshwor area carrying placards and shouting slogans like "Down with Republican system,"

"We want monarchy back, Down with corrupt government, Establish Nepal as a Hindu state," the protesters said. The demonstration was led by the RPP, Rajendra Lingden senior leaders.

Thousands of riot police were deployed in sensitive areas of Kathmandu, including Naya Baneshwor, Bijuligazar, Maitighar, Bhadrakali and Baluwatar, as the demonstrators announced that they would defy the government's order and enter the restricted areas. The Ministry of Home Affairs on 19 April had warned of legal action against those violating the law or inciting public disorder.

The RPP has also announced to continue their protest for an indefinite period. *—Agencies*

BHEL reports 19% revenue growth in FY2024-25

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

State-owned engineering firm Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) on Sunday posted a 19 per cent on-year growth in revenue at Rs 27,350 crore for the fiscal year 2024-25. The company also secured its highest-ever order inflows during the year, amounting to Rs 92,534 crore, a company statement said. With this, BHEL's total order book at the end of FY 2024-25 stood at Rs 1,95,922 crore, it stated. According to the statement, BHEL registered a revenue of Rs 27,350 crore (provisional and unaudited) for FY 2024-25, marking a robust growth of around 19 per cent over the previous year. The company stated that in the power sector, BHEL maintained its leadership by winning orders worth Rs 81,349 crore —*PTI*

Gensol had 2-3 workers at Pune plant: Sebi

Sebi finds no manufacturing activity in Pune EV plant, says Gensol misled investors

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Markets regulator Sebi has said it found "no manufacturing activity" at Gensol Engineering's electric vehicle (EV) plant in Pune.

Only two-three labourers were present when a National Stock Exchange (NSE) official visited the site.

These revelations were part of markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) interim order issued on 15 April following a complaint received in June 2024 alleging manipulation of Gensol's share price and misappropriation of funds.

In its order, Sebi found discrepancies as well as misleading disclosures to investors by Gensol Engineering, a company promoted by brothers **Anmol Singh Jaggi** and Puneet Singh Jaggi.

What did Sebi say?

- **Alleged manipulation of Gensol's share price and misappropriation of funds**
- **Sebi found discrepancies as well as misleading disclosures to investors by Gensol Engineering**

One of the disclosures came from an investigation conducted by the NSE, which revealed a lack of manufacturing activity at Gensol's EV plant -- Gensol Electric Vehicle Private Ltd -- at Chakan in Pune.

"It was found that there was no manufacturing activity at the plant with only two-three labourers present there. The NSE official called for details of electricity bills of the unit and it was observed that the maximum amount billed by Mahavitaran during the last 12 months was Rs 1,57,037.01 for December 2024.

The visit followed an announcement by Gensol to the stock exchanges on January 28, 2025, claiming it had received pre-orders for 30,000 units of its newly launched EVs showcased at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025.

However, upon reviewing the documents provided by the company, Sebi found that the orders were Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) entered with nine entities for 29,000 cars.

The MoUs were in the nature of an expression of willingness with no reference to the price of the vehicle or delivery schedules. Therefore, it prima facie appeared that the company was making misleading disclosures to investors, Sebi stated. —*PTI*

BLUSMART ALLEGATIONS WILL ERODE INVESTOR TRUST: S RAVI

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Sethurathnam Ravi (S Ravi), former chairman of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and founder of Ravi Rajan & Co,, expressed deep concern over the recent allegations surrounding BluSmart.

He added that such incidents will damage investor trust and tarnish the broader perception of the startups. S Ravi warned that such actions could shake the confidence of investors in the new ventures and tarnish the credibility of even the well-established startups.

Recently, market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) flagged issues related to alleged fund diversion and document falsification against Gensol Engineering Ltd, which impacted BluSmart, leading to the closure of services of the company.

Former BSE chairman highlighted that there were allegations of insider trading as well as mismanagement and fund diversion. By definition, insider trading is buying or selling a company's stocks using confidential, non-public information. —*ANI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Automobile exports rises 19% in FY25: SIAM

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Automobile exports from India rose by 19 per cent to over 53 lakh units in the last 2024-25 fiscal year driven by robust demand for passenger vehicles, two wheelers and commercial vehicles in the overseas markets. Overall exports last fiscal stood at 53.63 lakh units as compared with 45 lakh units in 2023-24 fiscal ending 31 March, 2024. Passenger vehicle shipments rose by 15 per cent to 7,70,364 units last fiscal as against 6,72,105 units in FY24. The segment reported its best ever yearly performance last fiscal driven by demand for global models being manufactured in India, industry body SIAM stated. With manufacturing quality improving, some companies have also commenced exporting to developed markets, it added.—*PTI*

NIIT to acquire remaining shares of IFBI

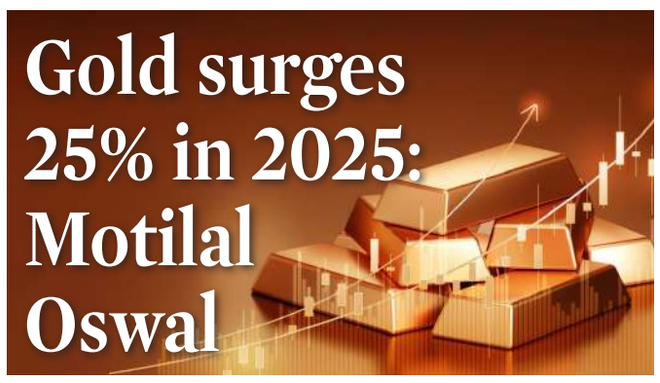
NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

NIIT Ltd board has approved the purchase of an additional 19.50 lakh equity shares of NIIT Institute of Finance Banking and Insurance Training Ltd (IFBI) to fully acquire the subsidiary, according to an exchange filing. NIIT holds 80.72 per cent stake in IFBI, and post the aforesaid acquisition, IFBI will become its wholly owned subsidiary, the filing stated. The shares will be acquired from ICICI Bank Limited (1.9 million shares, 18.79 per cent stake) and individual shareholders (50,000 shares, 0.49 per cent stake). The aggregate consideration for the acquisition of shares from ICICI Bank is expected to be between Rs 4.7 crore and Rs 6.5 crore. The acquisition is expected to be completed by 30 September, 2025, according to the filing on Saturday.—*PTI*

Macrotech cuts net debt by 7% in March

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Realty major Macrotech Developers, which operates under the Lodha brand, cut its net debt by seven per cent to Rs 3,990 crore in the January–March quarter, driven by record housing sales and strong customer collections. Debt stood at over Rs 4,300 crore as of December 2024. Despite investing heavily in land acquisition, the company maintained robust internal cash flow. Sales bookings rose 21 per cent to Rs 17,630 crore in FY25, while collections jumped 29 per cent to Rs 14,490 crore. It acquired 10 land parcels across MMR, Bengaluru and Pune, with a revenue potential of Rs 23,700 crore. Macrotech also resolved a trademark dispute with House of Abhinandan Lodha; both firms will now operate independently.—*PTI*



NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Gold prices have surged 25 per cent in the first four months of 2025, hitting record highs on both MCX and COMEX, according to Motilal Oswal Financial Services (MOFSL). The rally is driven by rising geopolitical tensions, US-China trade disputes, and robust safe-haven demand from both institutional and retail investors.

Motilal Oswal maintains a bullish outlook, citing persistent trade tensions, inflationary pressures, central bank gold buying, and a weakening US dollar—down 7 per cent this year—as key support factors. Technical charts show gold support at Rs 91,000 and resistance at Rs 99,000 per 10g on MCX; on COMEX, between USD 3,100 and USD 3,400 per ounce.

Gold's rise has outpaced silver's, driven by strong investor confidence. Despite brief corrections following tariff comments by President Trump, gold has shown resilience.

Trump's aggressive tariff policies, especially on China have triggered fears of prolonged economic slowdown or stagflation in the US.

Emerging markets, notably China, continue to increase gold reserves. The Federal Reserve, after cutting interest rates thrice in 2024, has adopted a wait-and-watch stance.

With inflation risks and global uncertainty persisting, MOFSL reiterates a "buy on dips" view for gold in the medium to long term. —*ANI*

10 firms' mcap jumps by ₹3.84L cr

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The combined market valuation of the top-10 most valued firms jumped by a whopping Rs 3,84,004.73 crore in the holiday-shortened last week, in-tandem with a smart rally in equities, with HDFC Bank and Bharti Airtel emerging as the biggest gainers.

Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 3,395.94 points or 4.51 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,023.1 points or 4.48 per cent.

Markets witnessed a robust recovery and surged over 4.5 per cent in the holiday-shortened week, driven by favorable cues from both domestic and global fronts, Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"The rally was primarily fueled by optimism surrounding the deferral of tariffs and recent exemptions on select products, raising hopes for potential negotiations that could mitigate the impact on global trade.

The market valuation of HDFC Bank zoomed by Rs 76,483.95 crore to Rs 14,58,934.32 crore, the most among the top-10 firms.

Bharti Airtel added Rs 75,210.77 crore taking its valuation to Rs 10,77,241.74 crore.

Reliance Industries' market valuation surged by Rs 74,766.36 crore to Rs 17,24,768.59 crore and that of ICICI Bank rallied by Rs 67,597 crore to Rs 10,01,948.86 crore.

State Bank of India's valuation jumped Rs 38,420.49 crore to Rs 7,11,381.46 crore. —*PTI*

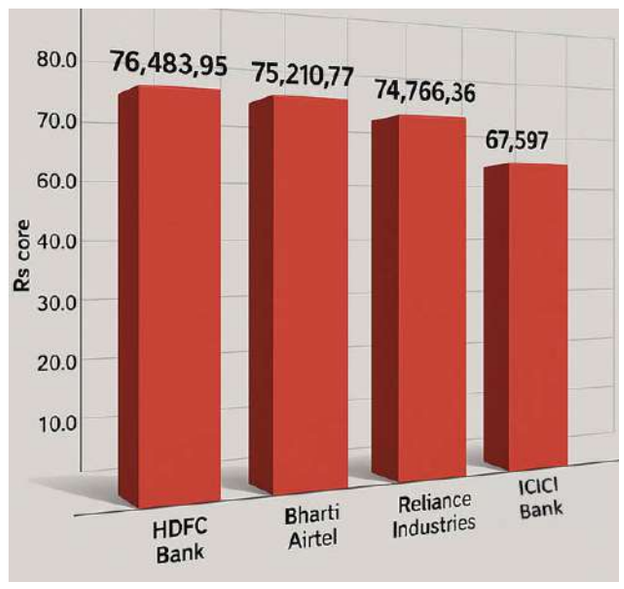


PHOTO: CHATGPT

FPIs injects Rs 8.5K cr in holiday week

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Foreign investors have infused nearly Rs 8,500 crore in the country's equity markets last week, after a phase of heavy outflows earlier in the month, supported by renewed investor confidence, resilient domestic economy and relative insulation from global trade disruptions.

During the holiday-truncated week ended 18 April, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) made a net investment of Rs 8,472 crore in equities.

This includes withdrawal of Rs 2,352 crore on 15 April, but investment of Rs 10,824 crore in the following two days, data with the depositories showed. —*PTI*

Tariffs to be key mkt driver this week

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Trading sentiment in the equity market will largely be driven by domestic corporate quarterly earnings, any update related to US tariffs and foreign fund movements this week, analysts said.

Investors would also focus on world market trends, movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and the rupee-dollar trend for further cues, experts noted.

"This week, all eyes will be on the earnings reports of companies like HCL Technologies, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, and Maruti. Globally, any updates related to tariffs and their potential impact on world markets will remain in focus," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. —*PTI*

India attracts $36B investments: Oil Ministry

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India attracted over USD 36 billion investment from nine NELP bid rounds held before 2014, and has so far yielded 177 oil and gas discoveries, according to a report commissioned by the Petroleum Ministry.

Under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), blocks were awarded to bidders promising maximum exploration, allowing them to recover investments from oil and gas they discover and produce before sharing profits with the government.

In 2016, this was replaced by a revenue-sharing model, where blocks go to firms offering the highest share of output to the government.

The 254 blocks awarded in nine bid rounds of NELP between 1999 and 2010 attracted USD 17.6 billion investment in exploration that led to 67 oil discoveries and 110 gas finds, and another USD 18.64 billion in development of some of those discoveries.

The 144 blocks awarded in eight big rounds of Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) from 2018 to 2022 saw USD 1.37 billion investment in exploration, leading to 6 oil discoveries and 4 gas finds, the report said. —*PTI*

- Under the NELP, blocks were awarded to bidders promising maximum exploration, allowing them to recover investments from oil and gas they discover and produce.

Indian toy makers eye US market amid tariffs on China

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Indian toy manufacturers are looking to capitalise on a "golden opportunity" created by steep US tariffs on Chinese imports. With growing interest from US buyers seeking alternatives, Indian exporters are positioning themselves as a viable source.

Ajay Aggarwal, President of Toy Association of India, said around 40 firms have been identified with potential to meet US compliance standards. Currently, about 20 Indian companies export toys in bulk to US. "We've seen a surge in enquiries from US buyers in the past month, especially for OEM and white-labelling partnerships," he noted.

A seminar is being planned to connect exporters with interested manufacturers.

US toy market, valued at USD 42.8 billion in 2024, is projected to grow to USD 56.9 billion by 2032, driven by demand for educational and interactive toys, said GMI Research. —*PTI*

- With growing interest from US buyers seeking alternatives, Indian exporters are positioning themselves as a viable source.

NSE adds 84 lakh new demat accounts in FY25

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India's capital markets witnessed remarkable retail participation in FY25, with over 84 lakh new active demat accounts added on the National Stock Exchange (NSE), a 20.5 per cent year-on-year increase, taking the total tally to 4.92 crore.

At the forefront of this growth are Groww and Angel One, which together accounted for over 57 per cent of these net additions.

Groww emerged as the single-largest contributor, adding 34 lakh new accounts -- a 40 per cent share of NSE's growth. Its active client base rose from 95 lakh in March 2024 to 1.29 crore in March 2025, reflecting a sharp 36 per cent year-on-year increase. Groww's market share rose from 23.28 per cent to 26.26 per cent during the same period, according to NSE data.

Angel One added 14.6 lakh accounts during FY25, contributing 17.38 per cent to NSE's overall growth. The platform's active user base climbed to 75.7 lakh, with a market share of 15.38 per cent.

Together, Groww and Angel One accounted for 48.6 lakh out of the 84 lakh new active demat accounts added to the NSE. —*PTI*

'CLEAN ENERGY AND CLIMATE'

Amaravati to be world's 1st fully renewable-powered city

VIJAYAWADA, 20 APRIL

Amaravati, the planned capital of Andhra Pradesh, is set to create history as it targets to become the world's first city to be powered entirely by renewable energy as town planners look to build an ultra-modern yet environmentally sustainable "people's capital".

With an ambitious plan to harness 2,700 megawatts (MW) of green energy, the city aims to meet all its electricity needs through sustainable sources like solar, wind, and hydropower, officials said.

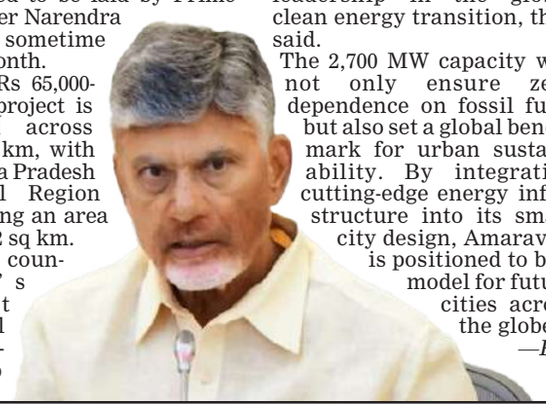
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister **N Chandrababu Naidu**'s dream new capital city project firmly aligns with India's broader commitment to clean energy and climate action.

The foundation stone for the greenfield capital city on the banks of Krishna river is expected to be laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi sometime this month.

The Rs 65,000-crore project is spread across 217 sq km, with Andhra Pradesh Capital Region spanning an area of 8,352 sq km.

The country's newest capital coming up between Vijayawada and Guntur will not only showcase India's innovation in green urban planning but also reinforce its leadership in the global clean energy transition, they said.

The 2,700 MW capacity will not only ensure zero dependence on fossil fuels but also set a global benchmark for urban sustainability. By integrating cutting-edge energy infrastructure into its smart city design, Amaravati is positioned to be a model for future cities across the globe. —*PTI*



IISc to develop smallest semiconductor chip

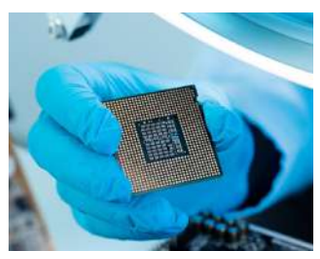
NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

A team of 30 scientists from India's premier institute, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), has submitted a proposal to the government to develop 'angstrom-scale' chips.

It is far smaller than the smallest chips currently in production.

The team has submitted the proposal to the government for developing technologies using a new class of semiconductor materials, called 2D Materials, that could enable chip sizes as small as one-tenth of the smallest chips currently in global production and develop India's leadership in semiconductors.

Currently, semiconductor manufacturing is dominated by silicon-based technologies, led by advanced nations such as the US, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.



The DPR proposes the development of 2D semiconductors using ultra-thin materials like graphene and transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs). These materials can enable chip fabrication at the angstrom scale, significantly smaller than current nanometer-scale technologies.

The smallest chip currently in production is the three-nanometer node, manufactured by companies like Samsung and MediaTek. —*PTI*

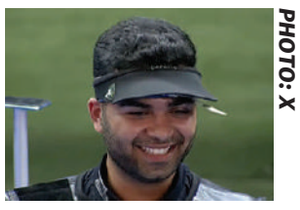


PHOTO: X

Babuta clinches 10m air rifle silver in thriller ISSF WC

LIMA, 20 APRIL

Paris Olympian Arjun Babuta clinched the silver medal in the men's 10m air rifle event while Arya Borse finished a creditable fifth in the women's event in her first ever final of the ISSF World Cup here. In a nail-biting final, Babuta (252.3), who had finished fourth at the Paris Games last year, lost by just 0.1 points to reigning Olympic champion Sheng Lihao of China (252.4). Seasoned Hungary shooter Istvan Peni, with over 40 ISSF medals to his name, bagged the bronze in what was a world-class field with a total of 229.8. The final featured a star-studded line-up, including reigning world champion and Paris silver medallist Victor Lindgren of Sweden, Jon-Hermann Hegg of Norway.—*PTI*

India off to flying start at Asian U-15 boxing c'ships

AMMAN, 20 APRIL

India started their campaign at the Asian U-15 & U-17 Boxing Championships in style with Hardik Dahiya and Rudraksh Singh securing dominant victories here. In the U-15 boys' category, Hardik (43kg) outclassed Kyrgyzstan's Kubanychbek Bolushov with a 5-0 unanimous decision on Saturday. Rudraksh (46kg) followed it up with another clean sweep, defeating Mongolia's Ibrakhim Maral 5-0. This is the first event organised by Asian Boxing, endorsed by both the Olympic Council of Asia and the newly formed World Boxing. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Azharuddin to move HC over name removal order in Hyd

HYDERABAD, 20 APRIL

Former India skipper Mohammed Azharuddin broke his silence and expressed his desire to approach the Telangana High Court, seeking a stay on the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) Ombudsman's order to remove his name from the North Stand at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. According to reports, Justice (Retd) V Eswaraiah, who is also the HCA's ethics officer, passed an order on Saturday to remove the former Indian captain's name from his stand at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, citing a conflict of interest. —*PTI*

World No. 1 Sabalenka reaches Stuttgart semis

STUTTGART, 20 APRIL

Jelena Ostapenko continued her dominance over Iga Swiatek by beating the world No. 2 on her favorite surface. Ostapenko won 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 in the quarterfinals of the clay-court Porsche Grand Prix on Saturday to improve her head-to-head record against the four-time French Open champion to 6-0. "Every time I step on the court with her, it's another battle, I'm ready for it," said Ostapenko, the 2017 champion at Roland Garros. "Even if I don't feel great on the day, I will just fight and leave it all on the court." The Latvian player, ranked No. 24, previously beat Swiatek four times on hard courts and once on grass.—*PTI*

Kohli, Padikkal lift RCB win vs PBKS

RCB turned the tables within less than 48 hours, chasing down a target of 158

MULLANPUR, 20 APRIL

The stylish Devdutt Padikkal blossomed under the able guidance of peerless Virat Kohli as Royal Challengers Bengaluru exacted a sweet revenge on Punjab Kings, keeping their all-away-win record intact with an easy seven-wicket victory in an IPL match here on Sunday.

Having lost the rain-curtailed home match to Punjab Kings on Friday, RCB turned the tables within less than 48 hours, chasing down a target of 158 without much ado in just 18.5 overs to enter the top four in the points table. Southpaw Padikkal (61 off 35 balls), who is an effortless elegance when on song, scored his first IPL half-century in 22 innings, while chases like these have been a cakewalk for someone of Kohli's caliber, as he played second fiddle for the better part of his innings. He finished with a flourish, remaining unbeaten on 73 off 54 balls.

The duo added 103 in 11.3 overs by playing textbook cricketing strokes with minimal risk.It was Kohli who started with a signature pull off Arshdeep Singh, where the rolling of wrists kept the ball down, and a bowler's backdrive off Xavier Bartlett to signal his intentions.

He got an able partner in Padikkal, who hit fours and sixes in equal measure. The best of the lot from Padikkal certainly was the lofted one off Marco Jansen, where the bat swing was picture perfect.

Against spinners, he would use the depth of the crease to rock back and running between the wickets was fantastic as on one occasion, Kohli pushed him to sprint for four runs.

Kohli farmed the strike with ease and when needed, got a boundary like once when he rode the bounce to back-cut Jansen towards backward point.

Padikkal was finally gone trying to got for a fifth six off left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar's bowling but by then RCB had all but pocketed the game.Once he completed his 50 off 42 balls, Kohli slashed Arshdeep deliberately behind point for a boundary. But undoubtedly the best shot was an inside-out straight six off Yuzvendra Chahal.

Earlier, RCB spinners Krunal Pandya and Suyash Sharma bowled stifling spells to restrict Punjab Kings to an under-par 157 for six in 20 overs.Left-arm spinner Krunal (2/25) and leg-spinner Suyash (2/27) were at their crafty best after Royal Challengers opted to field first on a pitch that had a hint of slowness.

It proved a captaincy master-stroke as Krunal immediately fetched the desired result, getting rid of Arya, who could not time the shot well of a slower delivery.Tim David took a simple catch at the edge of the circle.It opened the floodgates as the hosts lost three wickets in the space of 14 runs, slipping to 76 for four, and Nehal Wadhera's horrific run out added to their misery. It reminded one of their collapse to 111 against Kolkata Knight Riders a few days back at the same venue.

Brief Scores

Punjab Kings 157 for 6 in 20 overs (Prabhsimran Singh 33, Shashank Singh 31 not out; Krunal Pandya (2/25), Suyash Sharma (2/26).

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: 159 for 3 in 18.5 overs (Virat Kohli 73, Devdutt Padikkal 61). —*PTI*

Virat Kohli and Rajat Patidar during an Indian Premier League cricket match between Punjab Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, at Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium PHOTO: PTI

> **Losing two close matches on the trot has been hard on the team**
>
> -Sairaj Bahutule, RR bowling coach

> **Continue to focus on yorkers, his go-to weapon in crunch situations**
>
> -Avesh Khan, Rajasthan Royals, pacer

KKR VS GT

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	4
GT Won:	2
KKR Won:	1
NO RESULT	1

KKR vs GT Match starts at 7.30 pm IST

KKR eye batting revival against Gujarat Titans

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

Reigning champions Kolkata Knight Riders will hope that their strife-ridden batting unit will tighten its act against in-form table-toppers Gujarat Titans in the IPL match here on Monday.

The Knight Riders suffered an inexplicable meltdown in their previous match, getting bowled out for 95 while chasing 112 against the Punjab Kings in Mullanpur. That collapse was just a reflection of the overall rot that had set in among their batters.

But they have a ray of hope. The reigning IPL champions have roped in Abhishek Nayar, who was recently sacked by the BCCI from India's assistant coach post, even before his exit from the national setup was made official.

The homecoming of Nayar, a former KKR assistant coach, is sure to give a fillip to the Kolkatans, who currently have six points from seven matches and need to win at least five of their remaining seven games to stay in the playoff race.

He has already begun working with key batters like vice-captain Venkatesh Iyer and Ramandeep Singh their two weak links this season. Iyer, the team's most expensive player this season at Rs 23.75 crore, has scored only 121 runs at an average of 24.20, while Ramandeep has managed just 29 runs in six innings.

Andre Russell has only 34 runs in five innings, while Rinku Singh has scored 116 runs at an average of 38.66. —*PTI*

KKR players during a match in IPL 2025 PHOTO: PTI

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Chelsea strike late to boost hopes of top-five finish

LONDON, 20 APRIL

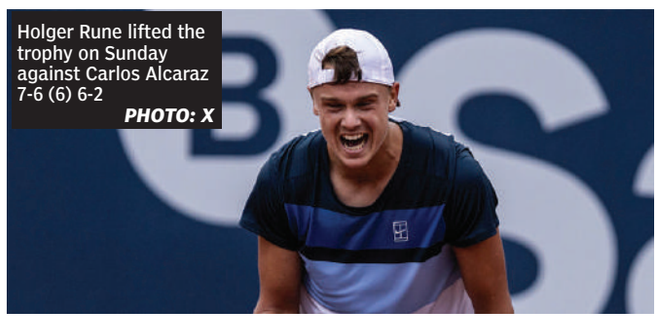
Pedro Neto's late winner helped Chelsea keep their hopes of UEFA Champions League qualification alive as they came from behind to beat Fulham 2-1 at Craven Cottage.

Alex Iwobi's fine finish in the 20th minute had the hosts in front, but two goals in 10 second-half minutes from substitute Tyrique George and Neto sealed a huge win for the Blues.

19-year-old George needed just five minutes after being introduced into the action to make an impact, rifling a first-time finish beyond the grasp of Bernd Leno from the edge of the box for his first Premier League goal.

The turnaround was complete in the third minute of second-half stoppage time when Neto collected Enzo Fernandez's cutback, taking a touch before firing the ball into the roof of the net.

Chelsea's victory moves them up into fifth place, ahead of Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa, while Marco Silva's side remains ninth in the standings. Fulham were so close to rewriting history, and boss Marco Silva and his players will be gutted at throwing away their precious lead so late on. Winger Alex Iwobi put them ahead in the 20th minute, and they looked like holding on until rookie George and Neto dug Chelsea out of trouble. —*PTI*



Holger Rune lifted the trophy on Sunday against Carlos Alcaraz 7-6 (6) 6-2 PHOTO: X

Veer, Anahat qualify for Squash World C'ships

KUALA LUMPUR, 20 APRIL

Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh booked their spots for next month's Squash World Championships after winning the Asian qualifiers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Sunday.

While Chotrani joins Ramit Tandon, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar in men's singles, Anahat will be the only Indian in women's singles at the World Championships, set to be held in Chicago from 9 to 17 May.The 17-year-old Anahat beat Toby Tse, the seventh seed from Hong Kong, China, with a scoreline of 3-1 (11-4, 9-11, 11-2, 11-8) to ensure her maiden World Championships appearance.

The second-seeded Chotrani, 23, will also make his World Championships debut after a 3-0 (11-3, 11-4, 11-8) win against Ameeshenraj Chandaran, the third seed and local favourite, in the men's final in 26 minutes. —*PTI*

India's Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh, after winning the Asian Qualifiers for the Squash World Championships in Kuala Lumpur PHOTO: PTI

Lewandowski doubtful for Copa Del Rey final

PARIS, 20 APRIL

Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski has suffered a hamstring injury, the La Liga club said on Sunday after the Polish striker was forced to come off in its 4-3 win over Celta Vigo. Lewandowski, who made his 100th La Liga appearance on Saturday, went down clutching his leg late in the game, which Barca won in the 98th minute to extend its La Liga lead. Tests carried out this Sunday have confirmed that first-team player Robert Lewandowski has an injury to the semitendinosus muscle in his left thigh. —*PTI*

Mercedes is not talking to Verstappen

DUBAI, 20 APRIL

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff says they have had no talks with Max Verstappen over a potential switch as they are "super happy" with their Formula One line-up.

George Russell is out of contract at Mercedes at the end of the year, with some reports suggesting the team will try to bring in the four-time champion. The Brit is just six points behind third-placed Verstappen in the drivers' standings ahead of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Sunday.

The Dutchman will be on pole for that race, after pipping the McLarens of Lando Norris, who crashed, and Oscar Piastri, while Russell will start from third on the grid.

Wolff was full of praise for Russell's performances in 2025, having finished on the podium in three of the four races so far, and insisted Mercedes have not been looking elsewhere.

"I always say I don't flirt outside if I'm happy in the relationship on a professional level," Wolff said of his drivers."I'm super happy with the line-up we have, I couldn't wish for anything better. Max is at Red Bull. We haven't had a conversation, we are continuing our trajectory.

"[Russell]'s been performing in the car to the maximum and is doing great. George is on Max's level."

Wolff spoke of his interest in signing Verstappen last year when Mercedes were searching for a replacement for Lewis Hamilton, who joined Ferrari at the start of this season. —*PTI*

FOCUS ON FUTURE

'Salah suits us, but Saudi league eyeing young stars'

JEDDAH, 20 APRIL

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah would be a perfect fit for the Saudi Pro League but the trend is towards younger players, according to sports minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal.

Salah, 32, was linked with a move to Saudi Arabia before signing a contract extension to 2027 with the Premier League leader this month."He's a superstar. He's an iconic Arab Muslim.

He fits the identity of playing in the Saudi League," said Al-Faisal, speaking at the Saudi Formula One Grand Prix, of the Egyptian international."I think from day one they linked Saudi to him, even though there weren't any discussions.

But it's good to have that, you know. Now you can see that any player who wants to renew their contract...they're saying they're coming to Saudi Arabia. Most, 90% of it, is not true," he added.

The minister said clubs had recently gone more for youth after bringing in the likes of Al-Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo, 40, Al-Ittihad's Karim Benzema, 37, and Salah's former Liverpool teammate Sadio Mane, 33, also at Al-Nassr."You can see the Saudi players being more determined, more disciplined in their training because they know that they're going to face top players every weekend and they have to be ready," Al-Faisal said."

It takes you a long time to get that mentality in," he continued, citing the example set by Ronaldo of being first in for training and last to leave. It's the determination that is there, that image is reflected straight away to the youth. —*PTI*

Raphinha leads Barcelona's thrilling 4-3 comeback

BARCELONA, 20 APRIL

Hansi Flick ran onto the field on the final whistle and lifted Raphinha off his feet in a bear hug.

The Brazil forward deserved to be singled out for extra praise from Barcelona's coach. He had just led a thrilling 4-3 fightback over Celta Vigo by scoring two late goals, including a clutch penalty for an injury-time winner.

Barcelona remained on pace for the Spanish league title as it opened up a seven-point gap over Real Madrid before the defending champion hosts Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

"It was amazing to see at this stage how this team gives everything to never give up," Flick said. He added that at halftime, he told Raphinha he needed him "as a leader" on the field.

Raphinha's double let him reach 30 goals in all competitions this season, the best of his career.

The loss might come at a price, however.

Barcelona's top scorer, Robert Lewandowski, asked to be substituted in the final minutes while touching his left thigh. —*PTI*